

## REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

<b>Title of the thesis:</b>	Russia's Role and Drivers in the Syrian Conflict An Analysis from a Classical Geopolitical Perspective
<b>Author of the thesis:</b>	<b>Denise Knorr</b>
<b>Referee (<i>incl. titles</i>):</b>	<b>Mgr. Martin Riegl, PhD.</b>

**Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the 5 numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).**

### **1) Theoretical background:**

The author framed her research in classical geopolitical thinking relying on works of Mackinder and Spykman. Given this, concepts of Heartland and Spykman are conceptualized. Besides those author, the author utilizes S.Cohen's geopolitical approach to international relations. Using the Cohen's concepts of geopolitical feature, both positions of Syria and Russian federation are analyzed from this perspective. This provides an apt starting point for foreign policy analysis of driving forces behind Russia's involvement in the conflict, which is the aim of the thesis. However, it would be beneficial to discuss Russian school of geopolitics, although one might object it is rather eclectic.

### **2) Contribution:**

With regards to this aspect, the thesis generally fulfills its declared goal, to analyze and interpret Russia's motivations in Syria. The main contribution lies in the detailed analysis of available sources (including Russia's foreign policy concepts and security doctrine). What I do appreciate is also author's analysis of changing equilibrium in the given shatter-belt which was firstly introduced by S.Cohen. Altogether, the author manages to reach the goal.

### **3) Methods:**

Relying on qualitative method, the paper inclines to foreign policy analysis and discursive analysis which is a relevant approach. However, methodology is not defined in the thesis and the reader is left to identify it by himself. What would deserve much better explanation is Cohen's.

My objections go to the use of primary sources. Although author uses both Foreign policy concepts of the Russian federation (2008, 2013 and 2016), Russian Federation's National Security Strategy (2015), she does not comprehend that the foreign policy country (defined in the concept) is only a component of the security policy which is paramount.

### **4) Literature:**

Denise has gathered a significant and sufficient amount of theoretical works and primary sources, however relies on English sources only which limits overall analytical potential of the paper.

### **5) Manuscript form:**

This is far the weakest part of the thesis. I do not want to comment all problematic parts, but will select just few examples. In the introduction, the author randomly skips from description of demography of Syria (which should be placed somewhere else) to description of roots of conflicts and the goal of the paper. Further theoretical concepts are discussed in the literature review instead

of in theoretical part, then hypotheses appear on p. 26. Another point is a division of a text into chapters and chapter headings. The main of body of work (more than 50%) is titled analysis and divided into sub-chapters Hypotheses I. and Hypthesis II. (the latter having more than 20 pages without any further division) which is at least unlucky, but it prevents the reader from fluent reading.

**Box for the thesis supervisor only.** *The author has consulted the project, working hypotheses with on several occasions. On the other side I have not been given a chance to read the preliminary version of the thesis before the submission.*

**Suggested questions for the defence are:**

**I recommend the thesis for final defence. I recommend the following grade: 2 (very good)**

***SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED*** (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20)</i>	17
<i>Contribution (max. 20)</i>	14
<i>Methods (max. 20)</i>	12
<i>Literature (max. 20)</i>	14
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20)</i>	7
<b>TOTAL POINTS (max. 100)</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>The proposed grade (1-2-3-4)</b>	<b>2</b>

You can use the decimal point (e.g. giving the grade of 2.4 for 61 points).

**DATE OF EVALUATION:**

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**Referee Signature**

**Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:**

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Czech grading	US grading
81 – 100	<b>1</b>	= excellent	= A
61 – 80	<b>2</b>	= good	= B
51 – 60	<b>3</b>	= satisfactory	= C
41 – 50	<b>3</b>	= satisfactory at a margin of failure	= D a marginal passing grade
0 – 40	<b>4</b>	= failing is recommended	= non-defendable